PERSONAL STATEMENT (948 words)
Field of Study: Economic Development

Growing up and trying to begin your adult life in one of the world's poorest countries is both an experience and education that leaves a lasting impact on every individual. It is always difficult to define exactly how it effects your development as a person, not least because while growing up one knows no other way. However, something permanent always remains. An understanding of the real nature of poverty, particularly when it surrounds your formative years on a grand scale, is something that will remain with me forever and will continue to shape my academic and professional impulses.

My real academic education began in 1985 when I was accepted to the Hanoi Foreign Languages Pedagogical University. My instinct was to study English, despite the fact that Russian was very much considered the most relevant second language in Viet Nam at that time. It seemed to me though that if everyone was learning Russian, it just made even more sense for me to study English, not least because I enjoyed it more. Graduating in the top five in my class, I was offered a position teaching English for the University just as Vietnam initiated its economic renovation and open-door policy "Doi Moi" after many years of isolation. International donors and entrepreneurs began to return to Vietnam and there was much demand for university graduates of English.

Working for the University would have provided some security but I decided to take a challenge in a very different area and to work as an interpreter for the International Relations Department of the largest state-owned petroleum corporation—_____. I was assigned to participate in the negotiations on offshore concession blocks between _____ and various international petroleum companies such as Royal Dutch Shell, Total, Conoco and Mobil Oil. This was an invaluable early experience as I had the opportunity to deal with and learn the most complicated commercial and financial concepts related to oil exploration projects and which had never been used in Viet Nam. I now had a thirst for more new ideas and ways of doing things. To be at the knowledge frontier, I took economics at Hanoi Foreign Trade University, which was offering a new syllabus with a focus on the micro- and macro-level operations of a market economy...The economic courses at the University were very useful and improved education was the basis for my hopes just as it was for those of my country. They gave me better insight into the inefficient nature of the state sector in comparison to the fledgling but fast-growing private sector, and into the achievements in economic growth Vietnam made in the first half of the 90's. They also helped me to develop the tools that would help me take the next step in my career.

The vibrant private sector and its significant contributions to job creation and poverty reduction inspired me to a job change. I joined the _____Bank Hanoi office as a credit officer with the main responsibility of developing a corporate customer database. The one-year employment with the bank broadened my understanding of the operation obstacles of private businesses and their unfavorable business environment. With this sound knowledge, I secured another more rewarding job in a project to support the development of Vietnam's "infant" private sector sponsored by the U.K. Department for

International Development and managed by _____, an international not-for-profit consulting firm. After a few years, I gained substantive work experience and expertise through managing development projects in many reform areas, including private sector, banking, finance, and public administration. It was during this period that I realized poverty is not only a source of human misery but also a strong deterring factor to economic growth and human development for a poor country like Vietnam. I also developed a strong interest in doing research work on economic growth and its impacts to poverty reduction. I therefore considered my joining _____ Vietnam in 2001 as a stride in my career development as well as a great opportunity for me to be involved substantially in policy-oriented research and advocacy work for changes. Over the last three years, I have worked closely with many key government agencies to implement projects in support of Vietnam's integration into the world economy to promote sustainable development. I had opportunities to broaden my knowledge in various subjects through my active participation in research teams to carry out a varied range of studies and assessments on the impacts of trade liberalization and WTO accession to poverty reduction and human development in Vietnam. Through the successful implementation of these projects and studies, I was able to initiate policy dialogues between the government and other stakeholders from the private sector and civil society on reform issues. However, I am also aware that my limited economic background is not sufficient for me to provide quality advisory services on the broad issues of building good economic governance to the Government of Vietnam. I want to pursue graduate studies in Economics of Development to fill in my knowledge gaps so that I can contribute more in the future.

Given the confluence of my educational and professional interests, my long-term career plan is to become a qualified policy advisor/researcher on development issues in Vietnam. I will take full use of my past experience and acquired knowledge to conduct policy-oriented research on pro-poor development and equity in order to raise awareness among government officials, the private sector, and civil society. Whether I will be working for _____ or a local economic research institute, I will make my best in addressing the country's development challenges, providing an independently professional view against the government's reform or integration policies and facilitating policy debates for a change.